

## Servant Culture in Urban Families: A Case Study of Punjab



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### Abstract

Due to Modernisation, increasing number of working women, nuclear families, above all status symbol for many families have given rise to the servant culture in urban Punjab. Present study is an effort to assess the role of servants in urban families in Punjab and the economic burden borne by the families of different income categories.

The result indicates that there is a positive relationship between the income level of the women households and hired services of a servant. It is also found that more than four fifth of the sampled households pay up to Rs. 2000 per month to the servants. In Ludhiana, payment made to the servants by the women households is higher than in Patiala which further indicates the higher cost of domestic labour in the industrial city of Ludhiana. Findings of the study reveal that cost of domestic labour affects the servant culture in the families meaning thereby that cost of domestic labour and demand for it is inversely related. Dependency on servants has certainly led to the lethargic attitude of people which is not only bad for physical health but also increases mental stress and anxiety among women.

**Keywords:** Working Women, Non-Working Women, Domestic Labour, House Hold Chores.

### Introduction

India like Britain and America until a century ago, has an established culture of live-in servants, - who does everything from dusting to child care. Wealthier families have entourage stretching from sweeper to house-keeper. Demand for servants is rising with the increase in number of nuclear families, especially when both parents go out to work. To fulfill the demand of urban families a glut of unskilled workers has long provided cheap labour. The international labour organization says domestic workers account for 3.5 per cent to 12 per cent of the working population in developing countries against 1.0 per cent in rich countries.

Hired help plays a huge role in hierarchical Indian society. Most middle class families have servants in urban India. This has become the necessity or to be more specific a status symbol to hire the services of a servant. On the basis of their affordability most of the urban households avail the help of domestic servants to accomplish daily household chores (cleaning and mopping of house, dishwashing, washing clothes, cooking meals and care of children & elderly persons etc.) either in partial or in full form.

Many Indians especially in urban areas have a horror of working with their own hands, partly because for them it is undignified. Doing some thing does not give them as much joy as making someone do it for them. Working with one's hands is still considered as a 'lower grade job' in urban Punjab – thus it has become more a status symbol.

### Objectives

To analyse the existing trend regarding hired services of servants in urban families an attempt has been made in this study with the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the role of servants in urban families in Punjab.
2. To analyse the economic burden of servants on families in different income groups.

### Research Methodology

To examine the above mentioned objectives primary data have been collected and analysed. Data for the purpose have been collected from two big cities of Punjab namely, Patiala and Ludhiana from 360 families, belonging to three different income groups i.e. LIG<sup>A</sup>, MIG<sup>B</sup>, and HIG<sup>C</sup>.

Each income group is represented by 60 families (30 working and 30 non-working) from each city. A structured questionnaire was developed for the purpose. Data was collected through personal interview method to have a greater understanding of the issues. Collected data have been tabulated and analysed by using suitable mathematical/statistical tools.

### Respondents' Profile

Out of 360 women respondents, more than 70 per cent were living in joint family setup. A large number of respondents were concentrated in the age group of 30 to 50 years (66.11 per cent); followed by 50-60 years (18.61 per cent), 20 to 30 years (12.78 per cent) and above 60 years (2.50 per cent). Average family size of the respondents was 4.5. Only married respondents have been considered.

### Discussion of the findings of the Study

Results from the data collected in the study (Table-1) show that 58.61 per cent of the women households avail the services of servants. Non-working women also do not lag behind the working women so far as hiring the services of servants is concerned. It has been observed in the study that there is a positive relationship between the income level of the households and the hired services of servants i.e. as we move from the LIG to MIG and MIG to HIG category, hiring the services of servants also increases.

In HIG category almost every household irrespective of their working status avail the help of domestic servants either in partial or in full form. Reason for this seems that in this income category, hiring the services of servants has become a status symbol. At the same time most women in this income category may find it undignified to do household chores with their own hands. In the MIG category, study shows a rising trend so far as availing the services of servants is concerned irrespective the working status of women. In the LIG category households because of the economic reasons a very few families (3.33 per cent) availed the hired services of servants.

Comparison among the two cities under study reveals that in Patiala both working and non-working women households avail more services of servants than their counterparts in Ludhiana. Reason for this seems to be the higher cost of domestic labour in the industrial city of Ludhiana. This implies that cost of domestic labour affects the servant culture in the families, meaning thereby that cost of domestic labour and demand for it is inversely related.

In an enquiry to know how much payment is generally made to servants by the households, the findings show (Table-2) that more than four fifth (81.99 per cent) of the households pay up to Rs. 2000 per month to the servants. Only 11.37 per cent and 3.32 per cent households make the payment to servants ranging from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 3000 and Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000 per month respectively.

In the LIG category all households paid below Rs. 1000 per month to the servants, while in

the MIG category most of the households paid to them up to Rs. 2000 per month. Majority of the households who paid more than Rs. 2000 per month to the servants belonged to the higher income category. These results indicate a positive relationship between the income level and payment made to the servants.

The study also shows that most of the households in MIG and HIG category in spite of their paying capacity are reluctant to pay higher wages to their domestic labour. This is indication of the exploitative behavior of the households for these low paid workers. This finding also supports that in India there is no problem with the supply of unemployed and unskilled workers who are ready to work in the households even at subsistence wages.

The study further reveals that among the households who pay more than Rs. 2000 per month to the servants, the proportion of non-working women households is higher than that of working women households (13.21 per cent). This may be due to the reason that working women are comparatively more aware about the availability and uses of latest time and labour saving devices and thus prefer doing the work on their own according to suitability of their time.

The study also brings out that on the whole in Ludhiana payment made to the servants by the households is higher (Rs. 1104 per month) than in Patiala (Rs. 881 per month). Reason for this may again be attributed to the higher cost of domestic help in the industrial city of Ludhiana.

### Conclusion

With the increased modernization, nuclear families, rising number of working women, easy access to cheaper domestic labour, no doubt servant culture in Punjab has increased in the recent years. The study shows that there is a positive relationship between the income level of women households and hired services of a servant. It also reveals that majority of the households (more than four fifth) paid up to Rs. 2000 per month to their servants. It implies that servant culture in Indian families is increasing which is an additional burden on the wallet of families. It also reveals the mind set of our society that in spite of paying capacity of many families, they are not paying sufficient amount to their servants to meet even basic necessities of their life.

Dependency on servants certainly leads to the lethargic attitude of people. It is not only bad for physical health but also increases mental stress and anxiety among women folk. It is even against the Gandhian values to India. Unfortunately, our modern living style has totally failed in his theory of physical self-sufficiency which needs serious thinking.

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## Footnotes

- A. LIG Income upto Rs. 1,80,000 (Zero income tax for women)
- B. MIG Income between Rs. 1,80,000 to 5,00,000 (Income tax upto 20 per cent)
- C. HIG Income above Rs. 5,00,000 (Income tax upto 30 per cent)

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**Table -1**  
**Distribution of Respondents Availing Hired Services for Daily Household Chores**

Hire Services of Servant by Respondents	Patiala									Ludhiana									Total								
	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total		Total	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total		Total	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total		Grand Total
	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working		Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working		Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	
Yes	1	7	29	20	30	30	60	57	117	1	2	19	16	26	30	46	48	94	2	9	48	36	56	60	106	105	211
Per Cent	3.33	23.33	96.67	66.67	100.00	100.00	66.67	63.33	65.00	3.33	6.67	63.33	53.33	86.67	100.00	51.11	53.33	52.22	3.33	15.00	80.00	60.00	93.33	100.00	58.89	58.33	58.61
No	29	23	1	10	0	0	30	33	63	29	28	11	14	4	0	44	42	86	58	51	12	24	4	0	74	75	149
Per Cent	96.67	76.67	3.33	33.33	0.00	0.00	33.33	36.67	35.00	96.67	93.33	36.67	46.67	13.33	0.00	48.89	46.67	47.78	96.67	85.00	20.00	40.00	6.67	0.00	41.11	41.67	41.39
Total	30	30	30	30	30	30	90	90	180	30	30	30	30	30	30	90	90	180	60	60	60	60	60	60	180	180	360
Per Cent	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source : Field Survey, 2008

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**Table - 2**  
**Payment Made to the Servants by the Women Households in Different Income Groups**

Per Month Payment Made to the Servants (In Rs.)	Patiala									Ludhiana									Total								
	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total		Total	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total		Total	LIG		MIG		HIG		Total		Grand Total
	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working		Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working		Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working	
Below 1000	1	7	8	16	10	11	19	34	53	1	2	8	13	7	2	16	17	33	2	9	16	29	17	13	35	51	86
Per Cent	100.00	100.00	27.59	80.00	33.33	36.67	31.67	59.65	45.30	100.00	100.00	42.11	81.25	26.92	6.67	34.78	35.42	35.11	100.00	100.00	33.33	80.56	30.36	21.67	33.02	48.57	40.76
1000-2000	0	0	19	3	11	12	30	15	45	0	0	11	3	16	12	27	15	42	0	0	30	6	27	24	57	30	87
Per Cent	0.00	0.00	65.52	15.00	36.67	40.00	50.00	26.32	38.46	0.00	0.00	57.89	18.75	61.54	40.00	58.70	31.25	44.68	0.00	0.00	62.50	16.67	48.21	40.00	53.77	28.57	41.23
2000-3000	0	0	2	1	7	6	9	7	16	0	0	0	0	2	6	2	6	8	0	0	2	1	9	12	11	13	24
Per Cent	0.00	0.00	6.90	5.00	23.33	20.00	15.00	12.28	13.68	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.69	20.00	4.35	12.50	8.51	0.00	0.00	4.17	2.78	16.07	20.00	10.38	12.38	11.37
3000-4000	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	5	0	0	0	0	2	5	2	5	7
Per Cent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.33	1.67	1.75	1.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.85	13.33	2.17	8.33	5.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.57	8.33	1.89	4.76	3.32
4000-5000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Per Cent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.33	0.00	2.08	1.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.67	0.00	0.95	0.47
Above 5000	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	5	6
Per Cent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.33	0.00	1.67	0.00	0.85	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.67	0.00	10.42	5.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.79	8.33	0.94	4.76	2.84
Total	1	7	29	20	30	30	60	57	117	1	2	19	16	26	30	46	48	94	2	9	48	36	56	60	106	105	211
Per Cent	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Average Payment Made to the Servants Per Month	300.00	471.43	1110.34	710.00	1476.67	1218.33	962.34	799.92	881.13	500.00	350.00	884.21	575.00	1292.31	3023.33	892.17	1316.11	1104.14	400.00	410.71	997.28	642.50	1384.49	2120.83	927.25	1058.02	992.64

Source : Field Survey, 2008

Standard Deviation  $w_p$  = 891.63

C.V. $_{wp}$  = 92.65

Standard Deviation  $n_{wp}$  = 775.89

C.V. $_{nwp}$  = 97.0

Standard Deviation  $t_p$  = 854.40

C.V. $_{tp}$  = 96.97

Standard Deviation  $w_L$  = 642.18

C.V. $_{wL}$  = 71.98

Standard Deviation  $n_{wL}$  = 1577.97

C.V. $_{n_{wL}}$  = 119.90

Standard Deviation  $t_L$  = 1262.14

C.V. $_{tL}$  = 114.31

Standard Deviation  $w_T$  = 792.12

C.V. $_{wT}$  = 85.97

Standard Deviation  $n_{wT}$  = 1282.96

C.V. $_{n_{wT}}$  = 121.26

Standard Deviation  $t_T$  = 1069.06

C.V. $_{tT}$  = 107.70